

Lido Pimienta Miss Colombia

Afro/Indigenous/Colombian/Canadian/punk/folklorist/traditionalist/transgressive/diva/angel. There are so many layers to Canadian-Colombian singer Lido Pimienta's identity that you might get lost in them. But if you did, you'd be missing the point.

Her multi-textural, mind-bending voice and music project what Canada's *The Globe and Mail* called her "bold, brash, polarizing" persona, which constantly confronts the powers that be. But it also reveals an embrace of the Afro- and Indigenous traditions that is at once defiant, delicate and sweetly nostalgic.

Pimienta's new album *Miss Colombia* takes her ecstatic hybridity to a new level, building on the "nu" intersection of electronica and cumbia established by her first two albums, *Color*, released in 2010, and the 2016 Polaris Prize-winning *La Papessa* as Canadian album of the year. The latter was the first 100% independently released, non-English or French album to win the \$50,000 prize. Produced with Matt Smith, a/k/a Prince Nifty, *Miss Colombia* overflows with the kind of understated genius that promises yet another breakthrough.

As a Canadian global-beats trailblazer, Lido has an affinity for acts like A Tribe Called Red and Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq, but her work also resonates with British-Sri Lankan rapper MIA and she draws unabashed inspiration from the New York-bred Dominican-Trinidadian rap queen Cardi B. *Miss Colombia* has the effect of expanding the narrative about her dual Colombian/Canadian identity to her family's mixed roots in the Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Wayuu communities, while establishing an ambitious new sonic palette that brings her closer to home.

Who or what exactly is Miss Colombia? Pimienta's new album's title was inspired by Miss Universe MC Steve Harvey's gaffe in 2015 when he mistakenly awarded the crown to Miss Colombia instead of the actual winner, Miss Philippines. The incident not only caused her to reflect on the anti-blackness she experienced as a child growing up in Barranquilla, but the fact that while her sister was groomed to be a beauty queen, she suffered through an awkward adolescence as the "weird artistic tomboy" of the family.

"So I was like am I still Colombian or should I just keep calm and carry on because I'm Canadian now?" she said. "That was the premise and genesis of *Miss Colombia*."

The central mood of *Miss Colombia* coalesces around a series of moving, musical poems embracing how she's loved and lost. The journey magically documents an introspection tinged with sadness, yet still evoking a kind of optimism about experiencing the emotion in glorious repetition. "Te Quería," (I Wanted You) pulses with a kind of samba-like cumbia, floating in the memory of desire and denial. The narrator's "want" is quickly dismissed by quoting 2018's Latin trap hit "Te Boté" (I discarded you).

As Pimienta more firmly grounded herself in her return to the Caribbean coast of Colombia, where *Miss Colombia* was recorded "live" in rustic settings, her approach evolved from the opulent electronic crafting of *La Papessa* to something even more sensual and spiritual. The change in scenery helped her closer to her goal of re-contextualizing her music. "It's very easy to control electronic music," she recalled. "What's hard about electronic music is to make it sound emotional, make it sound beautiful."

The emblematic track “Eso Que Tu Haces,” flows with an ethereal mysticism that fuses Lido’s love for traditional *porro* and slow-building cumbia. Its unique orchestral swirl of wind instruments and synthetic sounds quickly sets the tone for *Miss Colombia*. On “Nada,” she teams up with Bomba Estereo’s Li Samuet, venturing further with her transcendent soprano, crafted with precision and clarity, and driven by sharp-edged metallic beats.

Lido clearly remembers the moment when she began her journey as a transnational, cultural mixing experiment as a singer. The brashly dynamic electro-cumbia diva had gone through several phases, starting in her early teens fronting punk and metal bands, and had become obsessed with trip-hop pioneers Massive Attack and Tricky.

“It was before I moved to Canada, I was in this dance group called Cumbé in Colombia,” she recalled. “My cousin was one of the drummers in the group and he told me, ‘you know you have a really good voice, why would you waste that voice on this depressing music?’”

Pimienta’s cousin then introduced her to an Afro-Colombian group called Sexteto Tabala, who she later collaborated with on the song “Quiero Que Me Salves” (I Want You To Save Me). Initially formed in 1996, Sexteto Tabalá are the cultural heartbeat of Palenque and guardians of Afro-Latin musical history who can swing like a salsa band, groove like a fuji orchestra and serenade you all at the same time. They are one of the most representative musical expressions of the African communities in Colombia.

Pimienta credits her time in Sexteto with the development of her singing and overall aesthetic. “That’s what shaped me, how I learned to have stage control,” she said. “It wasn’t because of some bar in Ontario; it was because I was in front of thousands of people singing Afro-Colombian spiritual music.”

That’s what makes the flow of *Miss Colombia* so riveting and rewarding. Structurally it’s bookended by two versions of “Para Transcribir,” one listed as “Sol,” (Sun) and the other “Luna” (Moon), a song that tries two come to grips with Pimienta--who is fully bilingual--as a perpetual translator of cultures. The edgy playfulness of her love songs gives way to tracks like “Quiero Que Me Salves,” “Pelo Cucu,” which celebrates the symbolic African texture of her hair, and “Resisto y Ya,” which makes pointed reference to recent massive Colombian protests against the current government.

With the latter track, Lido wants to make it clear that while she shares the popular disdain for a “politics of division” that squeezes Colombians, she insists that just by being who she is, an Afro-Indigenous, queer feminist, and Canadian outsider, she has always been engaged in resistance. The setting of the recording with Sexteto Tabala in San Basilio de Palenque, a historic town settled by escaped slaves in the 17th century, allows for an expression of healing through traditional culture. “The chance has arrived/To fix our past,” she sings hauntingly in the chorus of “Quiero Que Me Salves.”

“Sometimes I feel like *Miss Colombia* is me really doing it for real,” mused Lido. “Like I feel everything up until this point has been happy accident or a horrible accident. This album has been a beautiful process. It’s a really good representation of where I am now and where I’m ready to go next.”